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A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE THE ST. GEORGE'S SOCIETY

— BY —

THE REV. T. W. WINFIELD,

*In Emmanuel Church, Ottawa, on Sunday, April 26th,
1891.*

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

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SERMON.

"For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them, as the Lord our God is in all things that we call upon him for."—Deut. iv, 7.

"For one is your Master even Christ, and all ye are brethren."—Matthew xxii, 8.

The Saint George's Society at whose call we gather here to worship God, has, if I understand it, a two-fold purpose in its existence, a two-fold object to attain in its members, viz. : The cultivation of a spirit of loyalty among Englishmen and their descendants, and the rendering of substantial aid to those who are in need—such aid being given not exclusively to those of English birth, but to a certain extent (limited only by the resources of the Society) to all alike, irrespective of nationality or creed.

Our Society is, therefore, both patriotic and benevolent, and endeavors to promote both loyalty and charity, and seeks to induce in the hearts of all its members a strong attachment to all that is good and worthy in our national traditions, and a spirit of kindly benevolence in regard to the needs of others.

It is our purpose now, to refer to both these matters. We believe that the spirit of loyalty ought to be cultivated more largely than it is by every one who in this age has shared the rich heritage that Englishmen enjoy, and especially by every subject of British rule all the world over who has reaped the benefits and shared the blessings of the benevolent and beneficent reign of our gracious Queen.

Under her reign and partly as a result of her noble character and pure life we have been raised to the highest summit of fame of any nation under heaven, and it is but just and reason-

able that from the heart of every subject of Her Majesty's reign throughout the entire world there should be breathed—in all purity of meaning and without any equivocation that grand national prayer "*God Save the Queen.*"

Certainly from every loyal heart that prayer will ever arise and the arm of every true Briton will be nerved as with a giant's strength to resist every malevolent purpose that would destroy one prop of that throne that is established in righteousness and truth, and that is bound by a thousand bands to the loyal hearts of British people.

Then too a part of our ascendancy is due to the inherent qualities of the race. The English race and the English language have penetrated every continent and sailed every sea. They have preserved their national characteristics always and conserved all that was best and dearest to their hearts. Dispersed in every climate they are yet one in their love for the land that gave them birth and birthright, and whether Imperial Federation ever becomes a fact, politically or not—there is a federation that we trust nothing will ever destroy—the federation of their hearts' love for the land they call their home—its civil liberty, its religious freedom, its historic associations, and for all the myriad influences that have made its people what they are.

The British subject who is not proud of his glorious heritage either does not know, or has not the sense to appreciate the numberless gifts and endowments which—through the ages—Divine Providence has been pleased to bestow on this highly favoured race. I am sure that every right feeling man will unite with us in thanksgiving for all the rich inheritance that comes to us from the past generations of our race. We rejoice in the noble deeds of a noble ancestry whose life blood purchased for us freedom from tyranny, and whose wisdom united for us—as they are united in no other nation on the earth—the inestimable blessings of individual freedom and the safeguards of good laws.

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We give thanks for all material growth and national prosperity; for the changes in men's outward lives which have made what were once the privilege of the few to be now the patrimony of the many; for all that has been beneficent or just in legislation; for the widespread diffusion of human knowledge; for every great struggle waged in the interests of truth, and for every great work achieved.

As we pass in and out amid our manifold gifts to-day and use (sometimes without thinking) our inestimable privileges, we pass over a bridge—nay a solid road—built by the self denying labours of noble men who were heaven's truest heroes, and we reverence these—the thinkers and the workers in all good causes, and we inscribe their names high up upon the roll of fame, and honour them—the nobly good—the truly great.

And now while we think with satisfaction of the noble heritage we have received from past generations of our race, while we stimulate each other's loyalty with thoughts of the national blessings that are part of our birthright, while we recognize all the avenues through which we have received the inheritance that is ours; it is required of us that we go one step farther and unite in thanksgiving to the great Author of all good, the Divine Originator of all our faculties and endowments of every kind. We are thankful for all human skill and wisdom that have wrought for the well being of our race, for the long chain of circumstances that has made us what we are. It is a chain that stretches back through the ages, and to make its various links there have been welded together the best products of all civilized races of men—but I am sure that we, as Christians, must recognize and acknowledge that in the fashioning of every link thereof there has been the guiding hand of an overwatching God, and to Him the great cause of all, the highest, truest and best of all the objects of our love and veneration—to Him we ascribe our grateful thanks and heartfelt praise for all His gracious dealings with our race.

We are old fashioned enough to believe that a Divine and Almighty plan has been and is being worked out in all our national history, and that every event that has tended to fashion the national character or that has left its effect upon the national life has been included in that Almighty plan, and we believe, moreover, that this great plan includes not only the race to which we belong *as a whole*, but also each individual, that it is a plan, beneficent in its design, breathing of love in its every part, making for our blessedness always, that, in short it is the plan of a Father who seeks only His children's well being and desires for each one of us that we should do, and be, the most, and the best, that we are capable of doing and being.

The Society that we represent expects this much of all its members that they will advance its interests by every means within their power and that as individuals they will do and be the most and best they are capable of.

In this sense the St. George's Society has its religious aspect—not in the sense that it has formulated any elaborate creed to be subscribed by its members, but in the broader sense, that it seeks to produce, to cultivate and foster always the fruits of *good living* and the fruits of *well doing*.

Probably we should not all agree if we were discussing the best form of church government or the best order of church service. We represent different denominations of Christians, or rather let me say different branches of the one great family of God—we vary in temperament and disposition, in our preferences and prejudices, in our likes and dislikes, but whatever variations there may be in our creeds, whatever differences in our forms of service,—I am sure we all stand together on common ground in our appreciation of the duties and responsibilities of our manhood, and in recognition of the fact that in order to be true men, men worthy of our ancestry and faithful to our traditions, there must be rooted and grounded in us those same great principles of faith and duty that made our forefathers

strong, in order that there may be the outcome thereof—the fruit of good living and of well doing.

And it seems to me that this is by far the most important part of the requirement of Christianity as expounded by Jesus Christ. No matter what a man *says* he believes, the final appeal must be to the life and character that he lives and bears.

It is an inestimable privilege to have a pure creed, a privilege that I trust none of us despise or neglect—to have our faith rooted and grounded in the eternal verities of the word of God, but we cannot be everlastingly digging about the roots of our creed, and it is not necessary that we should, and so for ordinary conditions and circumstances Jesus Christ has given us a very simple rule that may be applied to the life that we live day by day. “Ye shall know them by their fruits, men do not gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles.” “Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit,” and “Not every one that saith unto me Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.”

I am sure no one can study the life of Jesus Christ on earth without noticing how large a portion of His teaching bears reference to this matter of conduct and character. By precept and example, by His inimitable parables and His deeds of mercy did He repeat and reiterate the necessity for pure lives, for self-sacrificing deeds of kindness and benevolence, for brotherly help and neighbourly succor among all His followers that they might in this way prove their attachment to Him and His cause.

If it be asked what was the purpose of Christ's life on earth we reply :—It was not simply or solely to make atonement for human sin and to open the kingdom of heaven to all believers, but also to teach men how to live upon the earth, to provide a perfect pattern for all their copying, and to establish for all time, the true ideal of a perfect life. And so He lived here for thirty years and more—not a hermit's life, but sharing the common experiences of men—except that in Him was no sin—and so

He stands before us in His perfect human life—our Master, our Teacher, our Perfect Example, and says to us "All ye are brethren," and He bids us act the brother's part toward each other, not simply because we are brethren of one nationality and sharers of a common heritage in this respect, but because we and the whole race are united by common ties of kinship, and there is abundant need that we, and all other societies that exist for the common weal, should obey the Divine Master's injunction, should copy His spirit and to the utmost of our power should seek to lessen human woe, should help and aid and cheer our brethren in distress.

You remember how many of Christ's words of praise were addressed to those who in the spirit of true benevolence had obeyed His will in this respect, and how His rebukes were both spoken and implied against those who had disregarded this requirement of christian duty, this high privilege of a true life.

In His parable of the good Samaritan there is an implied rebuke of the Priest and Levite who passed by on the other side, having seen and neglected the wounded man who was, it is presumed, of their own nationality and faith, and therefore much nearer to brotherhood with them than with the Samaritan who gave him aid. Their *neglect* was culpable and though they did not add to his wounds they are rebuked because they did not give the aid they might have given.

In His parable of the rich man and Lazarus no ill deed is recorded of the rich man, but there is an implied rebuke and condemnation because the beggar lay at his gates and was not relieved when there was the opportunity to afford relief.

In His parable of the talents those who had used their talents are commended alike and in the same terms, and though one had gained more than the other, the commendation is not at all influenced by the amount gained, but only by the faithfulness with which they had been used, and therefore the commendation is the same for both—while he who is rebuked, is

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rebuked not because he had wasted or misused that which was bestowed, but because he had not used it when he might.

All these teach us the same lesson that true life is not a negation—not simply the abstaining from deeds that are sinful and disobedient, but farther than this it is the positive well doing, the practice of things that are good, benevolent and true, and there is impressed the fulness of meaning contained in the declaration of the Apostle James:—"Therefore to him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." He misses the true blessedness of life who simply abstains from evil deeds, if he does not also set himself to the doing of positive good, and in the picture of final rewards which Christ gave to us, He commends and welcomes those who in benevolent spirit had served Him in doing good to others, and says:—"Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you, for I was an hungred and ye gave me meat, I was thirsty and ye gave me drink, I was a stranger and ye took me in, naked, and ye clothed me, I was sick and ye visited me, I was in prison and ye came unto me," and when they ask in humility and astonishment "Lord when saw we Thee an hungred and fed Thee or thirsty and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger and took Thee in, or naked and clothed Thee, or when saw we Thee sick or in prison and came unto Thee?" The Divine Master who is one with His servants throughout all time answers them and says "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, *ye have done it unto me.*"

Therefore, my brethren of the Society of Saint George let these words of the Master whom we acknowledge, of the Saviour whom we worship inspire us with us new diligence and fresh devotion in the work we seek to do believing that we serve Him when we truly serve our fellow men. May we ever keep undimmed in mind and memory, the glorious retrospect we have in the noble deeds of the ancestry whose name we bear, and

with each succeeding year become more worthy of, and value more highly the fair heritage we have received, and hand on to the generation that shall succeed us, the loyal memories that we have treasured in our hearts, and the rich inheritance that we have held for a little while.

May we fulfil more faithfully the duties of our Christian manhood and value more highly the privileges of fellow helpfulness and brotherly aid, and not only on anniversary days but each day throughout the year be worthy members of a worthy cause, and above all, humble followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, that so when for us the years shall cease, and other men begin to fill our places and take up the work we have left—as each one shall render up his account to the master and Lord of all—may it be our gladness to hear Him say “Well done, thou good and faithful servant; Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”—
AMEN.

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